

ETC



London

Anish Kapoor, *Drawings*, Tate Gallery, London, October 3, 1990 to February 10, 1991

John A. Schweitzer

Number 15, Summer 1991

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/35966ac>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Revue d'art contemporain ETC inc.

ISSN

0835-7641 (print)

1923-3205 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Schweitzer, J. A. (1991). Review of [London / Anish Kapoor, *Drawings*, Tate Gallery, London, October 3, 1990 to February 10, 1991]. *ETC*, (15), 55–56.

ACTUALITÉS / EXPOSITIONS

LONDON

Anish Kapoor, *Drawings*, Tate Gallery, London, October 3, 1990 to February 10, 1991

Anish Kapoor's first major exhibition of drawings at the Tate Gallery in London reveals an unreserved, painterly approach, unlike the measured, often ponderous, physicality of his stone sculpture, installed in the British Pavilion at the 1990 Venice Biennale. Recipient of the *Premio Duemila*, in recognition of a promising young talent under thirty-five years of age, Bombay-born

Kapoor has achieved a significant international profile as an artist of uncommon spiritual authenticity, weaving a complex socio-cultural fabric in his work that embraces Christian, Judaic and Hindu notions of life and spirit. The sincerity of this introverted morphology provides refreshing relief to the "ironic", quasi-erotic probings of New York artists such as Carroll Dunham and Terry Winters, whose simplistic, bio-morphic musings often lack the profound gravity of Kapoor. Perhaps the only true visual and thematic antecedents to this artist's intention in twentieth-century art may be found in the "tragic and timeless subject matter" of Abstract Expressionists such as Newman and Rothko.

Kapoor chooses to paint the unconscious mind as his subject, more specifically his own. He has affirmed that "what I am trying to do is to make a picture of the interior, the interior of me", which suggests that the drawings are concerned with the internalized *corpus*, as an unknown place, perhaps even a void. In Kapoor's drawings, more than in his sculpture, there is a sense of fear of the void in the ambiguity of the positive and negative spaces represented as the darkness of the unknown, the *horror vacui*, potentially either creative or destructive. The assignment of emotional "weight" to the formal configuration of his work echoes certain psychological requisites advocated by Edmund Burke in the eighteenth century in the fulfillment of the

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.

EDMUND BURKE¹

"sublime" experience.

The actualization of the emotional *gesamt* hinges upon the existence of two opposing states of being; the fusion of these polarities results in the ideal "oneness" of the implicit mandala. Primal fears are evoked in the recurring allusion to archetypal forms of a sexual nature, namely the universal duality of male and female identity. In the drawings this notion of

wholeness is given visual form through the conventional motif of the sphere; circularity suggests an equivalent finiteness.

It is perhaps relevant at this point to note that Kapoor himself acknowledges that the creative part of his being is feminine. This conviction must be interpreted in the light of the Jungian *anima*, the unconscious female characteristics within man. The female is the source of all creation in her transformative guises as vessel, mountain, mother and, ultimately, world. Moreover, the transcendent religious tenets of Hindu philosophy, the culture of Kapoor's country of origin, prescribe that the *shakti*, or feminine deity, is the source of energy, or consort of the male god. Kapoor's belief in the feminine nature of his creativity, therefore, is informed by both psychoanalytic and religious views of woman as Creator, and this finds visual expression in the drawings themselves.

The emphasis on binary opposition, which is fundamental to Indian culture, as indeed is the relationship of complementaries, is also the basis of alchemy, a subject in which Kapoor maintains an active interest. According to the artist, these drawings contain "a lot of shit and a little bit of sky", a description that evokes the alchemical change of base metal to precious metal and the sense of spirituality that lies at the heart of darkness. The initial alchemical state known as

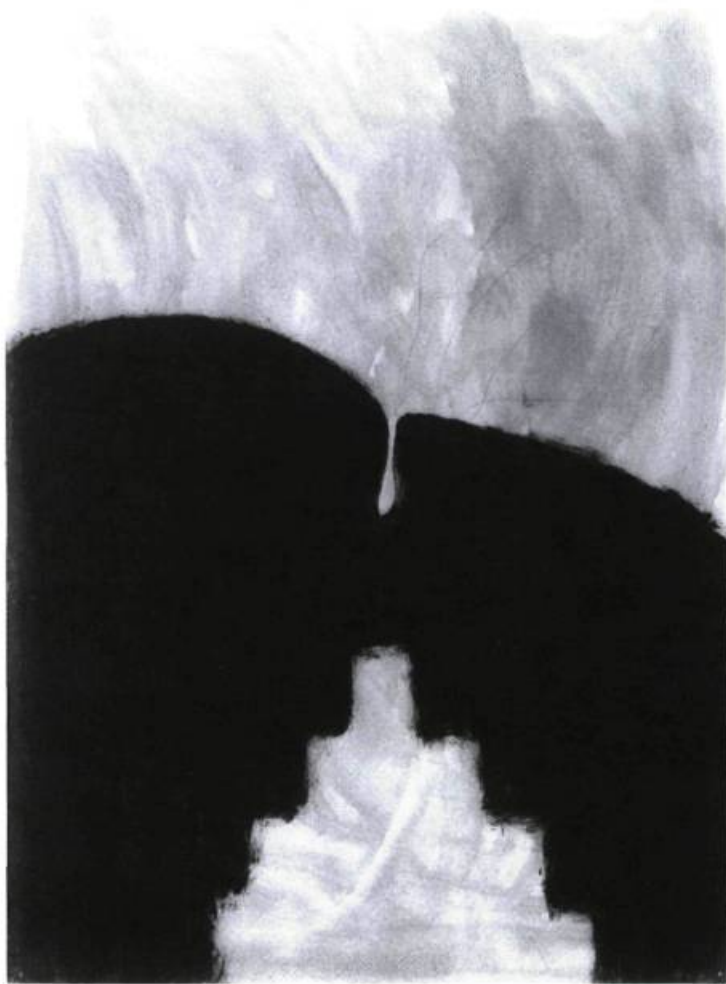


PHOTO: GARETH WINTERS.

Anish Kapoor, *Untitled*, 1987. Gouache and ink on paper ; 57 cm x 42 cm.

nigredo, or blackness, produced by the separation of the elements (earth, water, fire, air) is invoked in Kapoor's preparatory wash of dark brown on the sheet of paper. Using a palette limited to primary colours, Kapoor spontaneously "extracts" or "forges" the image from this *prima materia*, instinctively stressing the primacy of the mark, the hand of the maker. The coloration is charged with a catalytic spirituality yet remains a physical presence in itself. Paint is both substance and metaphor.

The appreciation of Kapoor's drawing through this alchemical metaphor lends a certain importance to the principal motifs within the work, many with scatological overtones. If the vision of sublime enlightenment is to be inspired, the undeniable presence of excremental shapes and viscid textures provides the

vehicle through which transcendence is achieved through the dross. Kapoor's attitude to materials is similarly visceral when, for example, he incorporates actual earth for its literal descriptiveness and as a metaphor for the Earth and, by extension, the female body or vessel. Earth itself is a skin which may be punctured or wounded like flesh.

Openings feature prominently in Kapoor's art as the point of access to the interior and therefore to the unconscious, with which the interior of the body is archetypally identified. An orifice is an entry to the creative areas of the body. One opening is the channel through which woman gives birth to the child ; through another she expels *fæces*. *Ergo*, the Creation myth retold.

JOHN A. SCHWEITZER

NOTES

1. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* 1759.

Editor's note: Anish Kapoor's drawings will be shown in Montreal this year, at Galerie Samuel Lallouz.